

Ask A Vet: Best Friend - Difficult Situation

Sunday, March 8, 2015

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

My faithful companion, a big old chocolate Labrador of 12 years, "Mike", was recently diagnosed with lymphoma and I was told he probably had a life expectancy of less than 6 months to live. I myself have some serious health issues and "Mike" has seen me through it all but losing "Mike" to cancer is causing me to sink into a deeper depression. Am I just overly sensitive or plain crazy? How do you counsel your clients when presented with the news of cancer?

-Plain Scared

Dear Plain Scared,

I am so sorry to hear of "Mike's" unfortunate and tragic diagnosis and the pain and agony you are going through to deal with this devastating news. First, you are not crazy or overly sensitive. What you have touched on is the incredible human-animal bond that can't be ignored. Just hearing the word cancer brings up so many feelings in us all as we usually know of someone with cancer whether they survived or not. Cancer takes us to a dark empty space in our minds either brought on by fear, lack of control in the situation, or sometimes even loss of hope. This happens whether we are talking about people or pets. The difficulty lies in when faced with the decisions that have to be made when it comes to our pets. We are making life-changing decisions for a furry friend that has always relied on us concerning their welfare, well-being, and health. They fill our hearts not just our homes and that unconditional love they give us makes our decisions that much harder. The human-animal bond is without question the very rooted foundation of the profession of veterinary medicine. This connection that lies deep in our hearts is why we became veterinarians.

We know not all cancers mean an "end of life" for the pet. Our responsibility to you and your pet is a very extraordinary one and we enter into a partnership with you to help you the client navigate through the decisions. We recognize the importance of your relationship to your pet and when we enter into this relationship as your advisor we are being transformed as well. We try to focus on the care needed to achieve success either through medicine or surgery. We try very hard to remain objective and give you the client all the options and develop a strategic plan that gives you the ability to make an informed decision. I can also say that team members on staff also enter into this responsibility of understanding and appreciation of the human-animal bond and further legitimize the vital role we have with you the client. Think of it as an entire healthcare team coming along side of you to respond in a compassionate way to meet both medical and non-medical needs. A simpler way of saying this is we become committed to addressing all issues throughout the lifetime of your pet both good and bad as any trusted friend would do. This is a very reverent and serious commitment.

-Dr. Wanda Schmeltz